



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Christa Smith Creates Wooden 'Bridal Boxes' at Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

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BEREA, Ky. – On Saturday, May 26, Christa Smith, of Elizabethtown, will demonstrate traditional Bavarian painted wooden bridal boxes from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.

Born in Germany, Smith moved to America and became fascinated with the cultural contributions German immigrants had made. She began creating traditional crafted items that she had known in Germany, such as chalk ware Santas, beeswax ornaments and painted wooden boxes in the Bavarian folk art tradition or style.

The Bavarian folk art of "Bauernmalerei" dates back to the early 16th century. The correct translation is peasant or farmers' painting, but during this period, hardly any peasant or farmer would have had the time or the energy to paint furniture, especially after working in the fields all day. Most of the time, cabinetmakers or traveling painters went from town to town offering their painting skills to "touch up" furniture pieces.

From the very beginning, there were as many different styles of "Bauernmalerei" as there were painters of other art forms. Many styles of painting simply included lovely flowers like tulips, roses and small blossoms. While these paintings were at times crude, some could be highly skilled as well, with bright colors such as blue, red, white and yellow commonly used. After 1850 painted furniture began to lose its appeal and many traditional painted pieces were relegated to attics and cellars or even destroyed.

Smith is one artist who is working to make painted wooden box "Bauernmalerei" treasured and collectible again. In the last 125 years there has been a revival of this long-neglected traditional art form. She creates round painted wooden boxes and trays and beautifully decorates them with colorful floral images in brilliant colors.

Painted wooden bridal boxes, which Smith will be creating May 26, were popular in Germany and America from 1750 to 1850. They were made of wood and often oval in shape. These boxes were given as a wedding gift to the bride from the groom, often with an image of the bride and groom painted on the top. Small items in the bride's trousseau, such as linens, lace and ribbons, or bridal accessories such as the bridal headpiece, handkerchief or bouquet, were stored inside.

Works by Smith are regularly available at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate -75 at Berea exit 77. The center's exhibits, shopping and travel information areas are open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the cafe is open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Admission is free.

The center currently features works by more than 650 artisans from 100 counties across the Commonwealth and a special exhibition, "About Face: Kentucky Artisan Works Inspired by the

Human Face,” on display through Aug. 26. For information call 859-985-5448 or visit the center’s website at www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency in the Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



Painted wooden bridal boxes demonstrated by Christa Smith at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea